



Iowa Genealogical Society

628 East Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50309-1924

Visit us on the web at www.iowagenealogy.org

515-276-0287

Freedom of Information, Open Meetings, and Public Records Legislative Interim Study Committee September 6, 2007

We represent the tens of thousands of family historians who have Iowa roots. Two of the basic tools that researchers use are the census records and vital records. Federal census records are released after 72 years, meaning that the 1930 census became available in 2002. However, we struggle on a regular basis to have access to the records of the most important events in our ancestors' lives – their births, marriages and deaths. Our comments today address this issue.

Currently, the policy of the Iowa Department of Public Health (based on a telephone conversation with their staff this week) is that all records on the state level are closed, with access only to family members and only certified copies may be issued. The access to the records on the county level is open and unrestricted, creating a somewhat confusing condition for researchers, especially those from out-of-state. However, there has been much discussion of S.2845 (the Patriot Act) and its effect on birth records and many county recorders have told researchers that the records are now closed because of the act. Tom Newton, Division Director of IDPH, has worked with us to keep up informed of the status of proposed federal regulations – as of now, none – and assures us that we will be part of the discussion when Iowa formulates its own regulations.

Attached is a schedule showing the policies of 18 other states, chosen somewhat at random, although most of the Midwest is included. It shows a wide range of policies but what we find most heartening is the use of “non-certified”, “un-certified” or “informational” copies which gives a researcher the information that they need. Even more exciting are the states which have on-line access to the actual images of the records, often without a charge.

Genealogists use the Social Security Death Index joyfully, with over 80 million deaths recorded and updated on a monthly basis. With that information, we are able to request a copy of the decedent's SS-5, the original application for a SSN, complete with place of birth and parents' name.

Obituaries routinely supply similar information as well as a cause of death. Given the easy availability of this information, it seems odd to close the death record of the same person at the state level.

We are asking that the State of Iowa review its policies on when vital records become public and that it institute new policies which would bring it more into alignment with what other states are doing and which reflect the realities of the new information age. We hope then to make these records available electronically,

Sincerely,

Theresa Liewer
President

Dennis Allen
Vice President

Examples of State Laws and Availability

State	Privacy rules	Online access through official sources
Iowa	Closed at the state level except for family members Open at the county level	
Arizona	Births more than 75 years Deaths more than 50 years Available as non-certified copies	Images of birth records on line 1887-1931 indexed Images of death records on line 1878-1856 indexed No fee
California	Informational copies available without restrictions	Death index on line 1940-1997 complete with DOB, mother's maiden name Birth index on line 1905-1995 with mother's maiden name
Colorado	Deaths & marriages more than 25 years to extended family Births - if deceased more than 50 years, marked as "genealogical"	
Connecticut	All vital records are open to members of genealogical societies authorized by the Conn Secretary of State	
Florida	Birth records more than 100 years Death records - no restrictions if cause of death is excluded	
Illinois	Births more than 75 years Deaths more than 20 years Available as un-certified copies	Marriage index 1763-1900 Death index 1916-1950
Indiana	Records more than 75 years available for genealogical research	
Kansas	Pre 1940 records available to a relative who is at least a cousin	
Kentucky	Unrestricted access - certified copies only	Death index 1911-2000

State	Privacy rules	Online access through official sources
Minnesota	Non-certified copies available without restrictions	Death index 1904-2001, DOB, mother's maiden name, order online for \$8 Birth index 1900-1934, mother's maiden name. Image online for \$8
Missouri	Certified copies to relatives No definition available	Images of death records online 1910-1956 Pre 1910 birth and death records online No Fee
Nebraska	50 year restriction	
North Carolina	Uncertified copies available without restrictions	
Ohio	Certified copies only. Application does not ask for relationship	Images of death records online 1908-1953 No fee
Oklahoma	Certified death record - no restriction Certified birth record - immediate family only	
South Dakota	Informational copies available without restriction	Pre 1907 birth index on line DOB, parents; names
Utah	Deaths available after 50 years Birth records available to direct descendants	Death record images on line 1905-1956 No fee
Wisconsin	Uncertified copies available without restriction	Pre 1907 birth death & marriage index Online ordering through Wis Hist Soc

In addition to the official state sources shown here, indexes to the records of many states are available through paid websites most notably Ancestry.com

Also, the Utah Genealogical Society has undertaken the microfilming of most early records, including the birth, death and marriage records of all 99 counties of Iowa from their inception. The cut off date varies from county to county, generally from 1910 to 1925.

These films are available locally at multiple libraries as well as nationally by ordering them from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City